

Pray for our priests' well-being

It's the night of January 1, 2001. As I am sure is the case with many of you today, I have been thinking about the coming year — what it will hold for all of us, what we would like to achieve, what life will look like on this date in 2002.

Among the themes that emerged in my musings today was the state of the priesthood in our diocese. That issue is always on my mind. But it is especially so this evening because our Presbyteral Council meets tomorrow afternoon, and we will spend some of our time discussing the present situation.

That discussion will become one more step in our preparation for our annual priests' convocation, which will take place shortly after Easter. Our hope is to determine our strong points and to recognize the things we have to improve. We want to do all that we reasonably can to help our priests serve their communities in their usual generous manner. No less do we want them to remain healthy and to grow in their own humanity as they minister to others.

My concern is not just that the number of our ordained priests is diminishing and that they are growing older and facing health problems related to the aging process. I am concerned additionally about their increasing workload and

along
the way



By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

the high, sometimes conflicting, expectations that are a part of their daily experience.

There are no easy solutions to all of this. But there are several ways in which we can work for improvement. For example, we can help our priests to learn new skills as are required by changing circumstances. We can hire qualified lay ministers to offer needed pastoral service to our communities. We can remind our priests that they cannot do the same amount of work that was once done by two or three priests. We can encourage them further to take good care of themselves — to eat properly; to get sufficient rest; to take time for retreat, vacation, recreation, prayer, life-giving relationships and intellectual development. I hope that all of us will continue to think about these things and to offer the kind of encouragement I suggest.

I want also to ask you to think about the priest who ministers to you and your loved ones. Do you have a good sense of the range of his responsibilities, the pressures on him, the state of his health, his level of self-confidence, and of ways in which you and your parish community could ease his burdens?

To put those questions to you in summary form: In this day and age, what can a parish community reasonably expect of a parish priest while respecting his very real human needs?

I think that a part of our common responsibility is to answer questions like this in a well-informed and thoughtful manner. Our Presbyteral Council will be doing some of that work tomorrow and will continue it in preparation for our convocation. In the meantime, I hope that you will be thinking about them at your family tables and your Parish Pastoral Council meetings. Such thought, conversation and prayer themselves will be a great boost to our priests. They will also contribute to the long-range health of our parish communities.

I wish you every blessing for this New Year. With you I pray that we will know the Lord's grace and peace and respond to those gifts with loving generosity. Peace to all.



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